

19th
cent
R703
.M43
1849

Medical Reform



Sol sapientiae
nunquam occidet

George Rosen

Gift of Dr. George Rosen
Yale Medical Library

Lxxviii. c. 34

MEDICAL REFORM
A PUBLIC QUESTION;
OR,
HOW TO SAVE
TWENTY THOUSAND LIVES PER ANNUM
WITHOUT PUTTING THE COUNTRY
TO A
FARTHING'S EXPENSE.

BY
A PHYSICIAN.

"Servare cives major est virtus patriæ patri."

LONDON:
J. HATCHARD AND SON, 187, PICCADILLY.
1849.

Med Lib.

19th

cent

R708

.M43

1849

LONDON:

G. J. PALMER, PRINTER, SAVOY STREET, STRAND.



MEDICAL REFORM.

THE British parliament is a noble tree, and doubtless capable of producing all those fruits "good for meat and pleasant to the eye," which constitute the social sustenance and hygiene of a great people; but the due elaboration of such products will ever depend upon the way in which the vessels of its stem and roots perform their functions. The wants and interests of the community are the only adequate pabulum of the national plant, and if these frugiferous elements be not introduced by their legitimate channels, and exposed to the action of constitutional influences, under the sun-blaze of public debate, our fine old English crab-tree will not be likely to present us with those hesperian apples which the fastidious political taste of the age demands. Nay, the good things we still have may vanish,

"With sound of harpies' wings and talons heard,"
snatched away by those birds of evil omen which have spoiled so many of our neighbours.

"Diripiuntque dapes contactuque omnia fædant."

Such, or similar, were the reflections suggested to the writer on witnessing a most interesting phenomenon in political botany during the last parliamentary summer. A branch of the said old English crab-tree—bare, leafless, and to all appearance dead, although upon it hung the lives of all the lieges—lords, commons, and all—as the sun waxed warm over St. Stephen's, began to show signs of vegetation and to put forth promising buds. The sight was so unusual that honourable members, doubting their eyes, were fain to call in the aid of another sense, and the delicate buds, as may be supposed, got somewhat roughly handled, many indeed knocked off; but others succeeded, and before the season was over, behold a full-blown flower, the fragrance of which, it was asserted, would effectually sweeten the sewers and cesspools of all England, overpower animal and vegetable poisons, tame the fell typhus, and so propitiate with its incense the eastern monster himself, as to deprive his expected advent of half its horrors.

Gratified with this example of vigour in the old plant, it occurred to the observer that the same dead branch, vulgarly yclept "Public Health," might be made to produce fruit as well as flowers, if the numerous fungi and other sap-sucking parasites which covered it could be swept away, and the rotten excrescences by which it was

wholly deformed and half destroyed could be removed ; or, to drop the metaphor, this fine country of ours, wherein more than twenty thousand lives are annually sacrificed by the want of ordinary laws to restrain the impostures of quacks, and to rectify the anomalies and abuses of the medical profession, might be at once delivered from so huge an evil, if its inhabitants could only be convinced how deeply their sanitary condition and very existence were concerned in this great question. With such a view, the writer believes that the subject will be best treated in a popular manner, having very sufficient reasons for doubting the ability of the doctors to cure so inveterate a disease ; and knowing, moreover, that the latter are now prepared to demand, and parliament to grant, a half-measure of reform, which, relating as it does merely to the internal organization of the profession, leaves utterly unnoticed those fatal evils which have so long disgraced the nation and decimated the masses.

Nothing can be more repugnant to right principle than the idea of inciting *the people* to reform institutions which are of higher origin and authority than mere popular expediency. This is that sin and curse of the day which is turning the world upside down, and will ere long reduce it to chaos ; but the writer, deprecating the possi-

bility of such a charge against himself, would observe, that medicine, *as a profession*, exists for the public, and not the public for the profession ; the power to heal disease is indeed a heaven-communicated gift, but its mode of application, the medical profession, is a human institution—a mere creation of the people ; and if it will not reform its own abuses, the people both may and can reform them, without being guilty in any way of the sin of the day. Besides, self-preservation and the highest considerations, both natural and divine, require the interposition of other hands than those which have hitherto dabbled in this matter ; let the public only learn its interest in the subject, and the fruit of *true* medical reform so happily harbingered by last year's sanitary bill, will doubtless be gathered in the next parliamentary harvest.

The distinction between the healing faculty as an abstract existence and the profession of physic as an institution, is as important as that between justice as an eternal principle and the profession of the law with its innumerable abuses as its exponent. This faculty, as independent of medical conventionalisms as justice is of parch-

ment, has been recognised in all ages and by all classes of mankind, and at the present moment is as clearly proved by the veneration with which an Indian tribe regards its mystery-man, as by the enlightened respect which a generation of philosophers feels for the highly educated physician. The influences of civilization effect it not, for it is a thing of nature, and commands the spontaneous tribute of an instinctive confidence, which ever tends to the preservation and well-being of the race. It is the instrument of all success in legitimate practice, and woe to the unfortunate Esculapius who, trusting to his mere head-knowledge, forgets the gift which alone can fix his patient's faith and brace his tottering hope ! Perverted, it is the essence of all quackery, for nothing but the assumed authority of an abstract healing power could thrust down the throat of human credulity those gigantic impostures which men daily swallow.

Such, then, is the *natural* basis of one of the most important relations in the human family—that of the healer to the sick, which exists wherever the genus homo is found, and in the civilized world of medicine as a profession to the great interests of life and health. Whether the obligations so broadly expressed in this relation are fulfilled, will be best ascertained by inquiry into the present condition of the profession, and

the application of its resources to the wants of the community, as we have daily opportunities of witnessing them in our own country.

That an elaborate machinery comprehending some of the first intellects of the age, and commanding nearly the whole range of the physical sciences, should be employed in medical education, with the one grand idea of bringing such an extent and variety of knowledge to bear practically on the treatment of disease, is substantial proof that the importance of this relation is admitted, and that its requirements are, to some extent, fulfilled; the fact, moreover, that in this city alone so many men thus educated exist upon the proceeds of their talents, shows that the fidelity with which the healer's obligations are discharged, is in some degree appreciated; but whilst these points are granted, we are met with the startling anomaly that at least an equal number of shameless quacks are daily outraging the common decency, common truth, and common sense of the country, and luxuriating in the life and treasure spoils of the most enlightened people under heaven! This surely is damning evidence of "something rotten in the state of Denmark;" the public could never be thus gulled and destroyed if the medical profession were efficiently discharging those high functions which belong to it as the great sanitary organ of

the social body ; nor, on the other hand, would the talents of hundreds upon hundreds of the members of that profession be rusting in obscurity, whilst on all sides ignorance and impudence flourish amain, if society were at all conscious of the amount of misery it inflicts upon itself by permitting the continuance of the causes in which those evils originate ; and if these allegations have any foundation in fact, it becomes a matter of deep moment to determine the true nature of those causes, for who can tell if he may not himself become their victim ?

Are the medical practitioners of the day so inadequately educated for the duties required at their hands, that the public are obliged to seek the assistance of quacks ? This question is already answered ; but it may be added, that the normally trained members of the profession, not only possess and exercise the ready intelligent power to heal disease—perhaps all that could justly be expected of them—but they have done more to enlarge the boundaries of general science, and to minister to the physical interests of mankind, than any other, or perhaps all other professions put together—a truth neither sufficiently recognised nor honoured by the intellect of the age. Is the heart of the profession at fault ? Does the constant exhibition of poor human nature's weakest points and worst sufferings blunt the

doctor's feelings and shut up the sympathies of his humanity? Hardly, for it is admitted on all hands that there exists not a body of men of whom a larger amount of noiseless but real charity and good Samaritanism is daily received by the unfortunate and the afflicted. But it is vain to speculate, whilst the facts are before us. The origin of the mischief consists in two things, namely, the total want of any available legislative protection for either the public or profession; and secondly, the principle of remuneration which the act of parliament commonly called the "Apothecaries' Act" has rendered it imperative upon the great bulk of medical practitioners to adopt. With the latter of these, as the immediate fountain whence flow so many fatal abuses, it shall be our first business to deal.

By far the most important of those classes into which the medical community of this country is divided, is that designated the general practitioners or surgeon-apothecaries. Not only does the vast preponderance of their numbers give them precedence of all others, but their education in every department of medical knowledge, and the circumstances under which their invaluable talents are brought into action, entitle them to rank as the most generally useful branch of the profession, if not the most highly trained. These

are the men, who, from the palace to the poor-house, from the castle to the cottage, under all the varied aspects of human suffering, are found devoting their energies and existence to a successful warfare on disease, preserving life, assuaging pain, reviving hope, and conserving the best interests both of individuals and society. To the Apothecaries' Act of 1815, is the country chiefly indebted for so valuable a body of men, for without the requirements of that act, their qualifications might not have been what they are; yet, strange to say, the privilege with which the Apothecaries' Society has rewarded its licentiate for an arduous course of study and severe examination, is the most grievous paradox that ever disgraced the profession, wronged the public, or injured the individual on whom it was conferred; that privilege is the right to convert his profession into a trade, and to be remunerated for his skill by the sale of pills, plasters, and draughts.

In this unwarrantable substitution of a commercial for a professional principle of remuneration, we recognize the greatest evil of modern practice—that which degrades it in the public estimation to a mere business of medicine vending, obliterating its high intellectual character, and banishing all idea of scientific attainments, as the alone *stock in trade* which a medical man ever can possess, or ought ever to be paid for.

But this is not all: in the pill and draught system, we see the great cause and true origin of all those varieties of quackery which have for their unprincipled object, the sale of nostrums and specifics: the Morisons, the Parrs, the Holloways, et hoc genus omne, whose name is legion, have severally taken their cue from this expressive hint: pills and elixirs that will cure all complaints, from corns to cholera, unguents and linaments that will straighten crooked backs, reduce dislocations, and set fractures, *if used in sufficient quantity*, all emanate from this prolific source; whilst the notorious over-dosing, which attends the apothecaries' system, has developed those opposite, and hardly less fatal forms of empiricism, which are distinguished by their contempt of drugs, as therapeutic agents, and the substitution of hypothetical absurdities, for the great experimental principles which the science and industry of the first minds of this and former generations have established, as the foundations of medical practice.

To the personal character and interests of the general practitioner the drug-selling system is most prejudicial, for it renders his pecuniary success in practice dependent, not upon his talents, but upon the quantity of pills and potions he can pour down the throats of his patients in a given time. It is almost superfluous to say that

patients thus drenched are apt to remember the consequences, both as regards physic and finance, and thenceforth, cherishing a wholesome horror of “doctor’s stuff,” to commit the keeping of their future health, to the homœopathist, or some such empiric; or where the patient’s regard for his medical attendant is too strong to succumb to so base an usage, the accustomed bundles of supererogatory medicaments are regularly *disposed of* as they arrive, the doctor asking no unnecessary questions, his conscience being, per force, satisfied with the costermonger’s placebo, that “it is the habitual *trick of the trade*,” and that “*the goods being delivered, they will of course be paid for.*” O ye right worshipful company of—— ——Rhubarb Sellers! Ye may well be oblivious of your penal functions, and shirk the protection of your members, when unlicensed presumption would invade *such special privileges*.

Against the mode of remuneration which an act of parliament associates with this patent right to physic the English lieges, the integrity and self-respect of a vast majority of those who practise it have long revolted; but the apothecaries’ *privilege*, despised as much by all gentlemen, as it is detested by honest men, has still been the only instrument whereby a just debt could be recovered; for the law enacted in the year ’15, of this nineteenth century, has pronounced the in-

telleet of almost an entire profession, educated through years of toilful study, and at an immense expense of money and life, of less value *to its owners* than half a pint of senna and an ounce of Epsom-salts. What wonder then that John Bull's viscera should be uneasy, and grumble under the inevitable griping of such a physic act ! The only wonder is, that he has still a stomach left for anything stronger than homœopathic infinitesimals.

But the apothecaries' question embraces subjects of far more importance than the mere dignity and interests of the profession : it is believed that, year by year, more than twenty thousand lives are thrown away, and that too from remediable causes, and in a country abounding with philanthropic societies and associations for the prevention of cruelty to animals. This is a startling assertion, but its truth, which may be proved statistically, will be sufficiently manifest from the following examples of the operation of the rhubarb principle, and other abuses that have arisen from it. A poor fellow falls sick—no matter if he be a clerk in some government office, with a salary of 150*l.* per annum, and a wife and six children to keep respectably upon it—he falls sick, and the doctor is sent for—Mr. Y. Z., of course, who is a surgeon-apothecary, has a red lamp over his door, and dispenses his

own medicines. Well, Mr. Y. Z. is a worthy and clever man, who does everything *en regle*, so he feels his patient's pulse, looks at his tongue, learns his case, and forthwith sends him half-a-dozen draughts, one every three hours, with a sedative at bed-time, and pills and powders to fill up the intervals. This he repeats the next day, and so on for a week, month, or longer period, with a regularity as constant as that of the neighbouring church clock, alteratives and tonics chiming in with full numbers as the stage of convalescence approaches. At length the patient gets well, and sends a bundle of draughts back to Mr. Y. Z. to apprise him of the fact, for he is necessarily ignorant of it, his business being to find out disease and not health. The bill is now inquired for and sent; but judge the feelings of the frugal wife as, casting her eye upon the sum total of the long column, or the startling figures tacked to the one short line, "For medicines and attendance . . ." she sees a whole quarter's salary condemned to pay for a family misfortune. The husband—poor man!—agrees with her in thinking it "hard indeed;" but then it is "the way of the world;" "the usage of the profession;" they "must submit," and Mr. Y. Z. is paid without a word. By-and-bye the quondam patient has another attack, and now comes the question of again

sending for the doctor; the affectionate wife says "Yes, and I'll live on bread and water to pay him;" the prudent husband replies, "No, it will ruin us; I must try something else." He crawls to the druggist, who gives him the best remedy which total ignorance of disease can suggest; or he obtains some worse than useless quack's nostrum, and, after trying it two or three days, finds his case desperate. The question now is, "Your money or your life." Mr. Y. Z. is sent for; he comes, pronounces it "*too late*," and the patient dies. His treatment would have saved that life had not the fear of his charges deterred the patient from sending for him; yet Mr. Y. Z. is a kind and skilful man, who does everything according to the "usage of the profession;" and so, in performing his last duty to deceased, which is to fill up a certificate of cause of death, he writes, "Died of acute pneumonia," instead of, "Killed by the fear of a surgeon-apothecary's bill." So much for the "usages of the profession," which render it superfluous to illustrate further the working of the apothecaries' system, by describing the wretchedness into which the loss of a father and husband would plunge the unfortunate family of which he was the sole stay and support. The case is one of many thousands, continually occurring; and when we consider the children lost from this

cause the mortality is frightful in the extreme ; but we can perhaps spare them in such an overcrowded state of the population !

Before dismissing this part of the subject, it may be briefly stated, that there is probably no one cause which originates so much imposition upon public benevolence in this metropolis as the apothecaries' "usage." Patients of moderate or small means can no more afford to pay for the general practitioner's six or eight draughts per diem, with powders, &c., "*quant. suff.*," than they can afford the guinea fees of the consulting physician : if, therefore, they are too prudent to risk their lives by going to the quacks or druggists, their only alternative is to come upon the medical charities, and thus the funds of those noble institutions are diverted from their original intention, and squandered upon persons in comfortable circumstances, at the expense of the really destitute and afflicted. It is difficult to say which class suffers most by this perversion of charity, the poor in person, or the profession in purse ; one thing, however, is quite certain, namely, that the supporters of these institutions are grossly imposed upon, and will be until the rhubarb act is repealed.

We now come to another class of men, who are certainly no particular ornament to the pro-

fession. The trading Galen, or shop-doctor, or surgeon-druggist, may be distinguished from the general practitioner, often by possessing only one diploma, and always by his systematic invasion of the province and interests of the regular druggist. He sometimes claims descent from the apothecary of former days, but his extraction is neither so ancient nor respectable, for he is the peculiar offspring of that modern chaos, in which the want of efficient legislation has involved all medical affairs. Here the commercial principle, the traffic in *goods* and *articles* by the member of a learned corporation, is not only unblushingly asserted, but made the dishonest means of acquiring a professional connexion. "The shop is a sure card," says this convenient hybrid 'twixt lancet and lozenge, and he generally proceeds to play it by selling his salts and sodas ten per cent. cheaper than his neighbour the druggist, although, being half a professional, they have cost him ten per cent. more."* And if the public are over-physicked by the surgeon-apothecary, what is their fate when they fall into the hands of Mr. Bluebottle, who, notwithstanding the "*advice gratis*," so conspicuously advertised

* Vide "Lancet" of Dec. 23, 1848, p. 705. Correspondence headed "Quackery at Walworth." This is a bad case, out the same thing obtains, more or less, with all surgeon-druggists.

among his coloured waters, goes as far beyond the general practitioner in overdosing a patient, as he does below the druggist in underselling a Seidlitz? The "sure card," it is true, has been played by many men now eminent in the profession, and a general impression prevails among the juniors, that however disreputable, it is a certain trump in opening the game of professional life; but the fancied hopelessness of a more respectable course, rather than the expediency of a "tempting retail," is that which compromises a gentleman's natural repugnance to the counter. This despair of success, except at the expense of honour and self-respect, is, however, only fancied: if the abuses which disgrace medicine (and doctors' shops are certainly among the worst) could be suppressed, there would be fair play for every well-educated member of the profession. It is needless to say that the half-educated, and those who are not gentlemen in principle, have no business in such a profession as the medical; they had better go digging to California or elsewhere. But this is perhaps a digression, our business being to exhibit the practical effects of these abuses, which are as pernicious to the public health, as the total disruption of all natural and proper relations between prescriber and compounder can render them. The doctor has become a druggist, and

the druggist, without a single earthly qualification, has assumed the functions of the trained practitioner ; the apothecary robs him of his right to dispense the public medicines, and in their stead he dispenses disease, deformity, and death ; the counter-surgeon supplants him in his sale of drugs, and to retaliate, he kills a patient for one half less than his qualified antagonist can cure him ; in short, the prescribing druggist is engaged in what is to him a system of warrantable reprisals, but the practical result of which is the decimation of the public : his path is strewn thick with the remains of a gratuitous mortality, for in spite of apothecaries and shop-doctors, *he must live.*

Such a state of things is somewhat startling in a country which boasts, more than any other in the world, its solemn regard for the health and life of its inhabitants ; some inquiry ought surely to be made into these matters, if it were only for the sake of tacking a supplementary clause to the “ Health of Towns Bill ;” for where inadequate drainage kills its hundreds, illicit practice destroys at least its thousands—a fact which no medical sanitarian will dispute, whatever a parliamentary commission may think of it. John Bull, frightened at the presence and prospect of cholera, will doubtless pay down his millions to pump the cesspools and

cleanse the sewers ; but here is an evil, ten times more fatal, which he can cure for nothing : let him then, if he be the intelligent and humane old gentleman represented, look to both these subjects, and whilst he does the one, he will confess that he cannot leave the other undone with any safety either to his health or character.

There are other ways besides those enumerated in which the legitimate business of the dispensing chemist is systematically assailed, and which have necessarily the effect of promoting in him the dangerous habit of prescribing whenever occasion presents him with the opportunity. Many gentlemen, whose position in the profession ought to place them far above the suspicion of mean or mercenary conduct, have a good deal to answer for on this subject : many pure physicians and surgeons, who regularly receive their guinea fees, are in the habit of exacting from the druggist a large proportion of his profits on their prescriptions, recommending their patients to particular shops, ostensibly for the purity of the drugs, but really that they may themselves get their twenty, thirty, or fifty per cent. upon the medicines prescribed, and thus carry out their sordid arrangements. Others, again, have shops of their own, apart from their dwellings, and kept in other names ; and whilst these quasi-pures profess to have no connexion what-

ever with drugs, they take care that, in addition to the business done over the counter, their prescriptions are made up nowhere else ; to secure this latter object, some indeed write them in hieroglyphics, which none but their own shopman can decipher. Thus are the rights and interests of the pharmacutists trampled upon by all classes of the medical profession ; and in the name of common sense and justice between man and man, what course can be expected of them but that which has been already described as so utterly pernicious to the public health ?

Of the professed quacks—men who *live* by falsehood and plunder—it is only necessary to say, that there is no country on earth in which they are half so numerous, or thrive half so fast, as in this. England indeed is the quack's Eden, and London his Paradise : here there is no law, no proscription : he may freely eat of every tree in this great garden, for he is already a god, though he may never have tasted of the tree of knowledge. Juggernaut himself, if he brought an Indian specific, might be naturalized, without adding much to the mortality, or perhaps without communicating any perceptible shock to our popular humanity ; an over-laden donkey, however, toiling up Holborn-hill with a load of cat's-meat, and a driver threatening to convert

his carcass into viands for his feline customers, would infallibly draw upon himself the sympathies of a tender-hearted public, and upon his master the execrations and penalties of those outraged sensibilities which we have a fine society to protect; yes, for although the loss of twenty thousand human lives per annum is a matter of little moment, and has no legal remedy, the oppression of a dumb animal is a crime alike horrible and unpardonable, and one which, thank heaven! we have laws to punish. But the driver of pussy's provision cart pays no duty for his equipage, whereas, a large revenue accrues to government from the exercise of the quack-god's attributes; and this may possibly explain the difference between the value of horse flesh, and that of human life. No doubt twenty thousand *poor dumb creatures* would be added to the yearly amount of defunct quadrupeds, if government had the same interest in holding out a premium to cattle-quacks for killing them; this privilege, however, is reserved for the intelligent bipeds of the most civilized and philanthropic community which the nineteenth century has yet produced.

In approaching the consideration of a remedy for these gigantic evils—if indeed a state of things wherein the foundations are so completely out of course, admit of remedy, the writer feels it

due to those gentlemen who have been so long and arduously engaged in attempts to reform the internal economy of the profession, to say that many of them have deserved well both of their brethren and the public; but it is much to be regretted that the foolish conduct and factious objects of others have brought the whole subject of medical reform into deep contempt, both with the legislature and the country; many of the latter, the chartists of medicine, have been accustomed to believe that the end of all medical legislation was to abrogate obnoxious charters, found rival colleges, or by any other means advance their own party ambition; and parliament, in the intervals of serious business, has been wont to amuse itself right well with the impossible farce of adjusting doctors' differences; but the disputes of these squabbling Galens have never till lately occupied a more dignified position. Now, however, something must be done, —medical reform must be carried, for a parliamentary committee has sat upon the subject, and by some mysterious process arrived at the impression that the thing is feasible. What then are the reforms intended? Why, the adventitious distinctions which have so long filled the profession with strifes and jealousies, are to be all melted down in the crucible of a College of General Practitioners; the English Apothecary,

the Scotch M. D., and the Irish Surgeon, are to have their individualities fused and run together in the mould of a general register; there is to be no more quarrelling, no more bad language, nothing henceforth but harmony and peace. Good, very good,—but what has all this to do with the public health, and the prevention of twenty thousand homicides annually? Doctors' differences may be adjusted, but what connexion have such amiable compromises with public humanity, (not that which spares the ass and slays the man,) whilst the quacks are poisoning our population by wholesale? The irregularities of medical education and standing may be corrected, but what relation has such reform to justice and philanthropy, whilst a large class of men, to escape licensed plunder, must needs be guilty of unlicensed manslaughter? The proprieties of a learned profession are no doubt consulted by obviating all causes of misunderstanding among its different branches, but how does this affect public truth and decency, which are daily outraged by those disgusting advertisements which traverse our streets, fill our newspapers, and cover our walls, corrupting with their filthy details the minds of our youth, whilst they destroy the bodies of thousands of our fellow subjects, government meanwhile pocketing a *modest* proportion of the profits? The interrogatory pumps of a

parliamentary committee might surely have eliminated from the surcharged stills of medical witnesses, some interesting drops of evidence on these subjects, but there is perhaps yet time.

The grand object of all true medical reform is to protect the public against impostors, and to secure the services of men fully qualified to treat disease. This can only be done, firstly, by rendering it penal in the highest degree for any one to meddle with the ailments of the human body, but those who have been regularly educated and competently examined in every branch of medical knowledge. The laws at present existing on this subject are inoperative dead letters; what the public health requires for its protection, is an enactment, plain in its purport, and summary in its application, by which the first offence shall be visited with a fine of at least £100, the second imprisonment for twelve months, and the third transportation for seven years. On the quack who either publicly advertised or clandestinely sold a nostrum, the druggist who prescribed over the counter or stealthily visited a patient, the mesmerist or other empiric who accomplished his nefarious object by other means than nostrum-vending—on each and every one of these the law should fall at once, and with full weight, as it now does on the forger, for society is not more injured by the latter than by them; the

possession of British diplomas, proving that the party had been adequately educated and examined should be the professional quack's only protection against these penalties, and even this should not avail where the principle of the imposture was the sale of a specific. Secondly, the power of medical men to dispense medicines and to charge for them, to keep shops, or to meddle with drugs in any form whatever, should by the same law be utterly abolished ; and if any medical man were found in any of these respects invading the rightful province of the druggist, he should be subjected to a fine of 100*l.* for the first offence, imprisonment for twelve months for the second, and transportation for seven years for the third : thus would even-handed justice hold the doctors in one scale of her righteous balance and the druggists in the other, whilst, to the credit of the nation and the immense advantage of all classes of the community, the quacks would nowhere and no more be found.

These, then, are the essential features of that reform which the protection of the public health demands ; on these points the country should insist ; the rest may be safely left to the doctors. But as the measures here proposed involve the vested interests of many thousand medical men, whose occupation (draught-selling) would, to a great extent, be gone, if they were carried out, it will save time to anticipate their objections.

“What compensation,” says the surgeon-apothecary, “shall I have for the loss of

“Pills, powders, plasters, potions,
 Draughts, ointments, drops, and lotions,
 Blisters, glysters, and collyria,
 Mixtures cum et ceteras—millia?”

“A good honest five-shilling fee, or more or less, according to the circumstances of the patient.”

“But a five-shilling fee, or your flippant more or less, will be no substitute for my six or eight draughts per diem, to say nothing of the interstitial et ceteras; and so those rascally druggists will run away with all my profits. Sir, your proposal is infamous!”

“My dear Mr. Cantharides, don’t be angry, and above all, don’t abuse the druggists, for by the proposed law those gentlemen must send you all the cases for which they now prescribe over the counter, or otherwise mulct of their health; and if I do not greatly mistake, the increase of patients will more than make amends for the loss of medicine.”

“Why, yes—there may be something in that: to be candid with you, I never liked salts or jalap, and I have always thought gallipots very unprofessional; but then, what pays like physic? Only think of eight draughts a-day, with powders, &c., ad nauseam! You do not mean to say that

the druggists are to be allowed to walk away with all this? Why, it cost me five years' apprenticeship to mortars and pestles, three months' hard grinding in Professor Stuffem's mill, and two hours' cruel funking at Rhubarb Hall to obtain this *privilege*."

"Very likely—such a privilege deserved to be paid for, and it is not for a moment contemplated to transfer it to a party who never passed through the ordeal of either Mill or Hall; the public are to reap the sole benefit of the change, for the eight draughts a day (*should they be necessary*) can be put in the form of a half-pint mixture, for which the druggist will charge fifteen or eighteen pence: the powders and other *et ceteras* may, *perhaps*, be dispensed with."

"Oh! as to that, in five cases out of six the medicine may be dispensed with altogether, especially as we shall then have no interest in ordering it; but you do not intend to let a patient off for five shillings who has been accustomed to pay eight, ten, or twelve—to say nothing of the dosing he will escape?"

"Why not, my good sir? Is it not evident that the fear of large fees and heavy drenchings drives multitudes to the quacks, the homœopaths, and the hospitals? These would all support men like yourself if they could be prescribed for moderately."

“That might be, but then—five shillings! or perhaps, in particular cases, half-a-crown! and some puppy of a pure crying out, ‘Poor fellow! it is as much as he is worth.’ Oh! it will never do—we are gentlemen, and must consider the dignity of the profession.”

“My dear Mr. Cantharides, the opinions of all the puppies in the world are of little moment in a matter of duty; as to that imposing phrase, ‘the dignity of the profession,’ how often has it been used to cover a mercenary selfishness, a vapid professional coxcombry, an unprincipled ambition, and above all, that assumption of importance without the reality which expects big fees because itself looks big, and of which it may be said, ‘*Quale caput, sed cerebrum non habet.*’ The true dignity of the medical profession consists in faithfully and efficiently employing that great gift of healing which the providence of heaven has committed to it; and how can this be done if the love of lucre or any other sordid motive prevent the full exercise of our noble art among all classes of our suffering fellow-creatures?”

“True—very true; but tell me now, if you would transport us for dispensing medicine, how should we manage when a sudden seizure demanded an instant dose to save the patient’s life?”

“ The medicines required on these occasions are very few, and a chest two inches square would answer every purpose until the prescription could be made up at the druggist’s ; no medical man should ever be without such a chest.”

“ Well, but don’t you think the shop drugs often much adulterated ? and would not our credit and our patients’ lives be at the mercy of the druggists if we gave up dispensing ?”

“ By no means ; for their medicines, coming from the same places, are not more adulterated than your own. A commission, however, consisting of a good analytical chemist, and an experienced pharmacist, (neither of whom should be in any way connected with the *trade*) visiting the shops and examining the drugs at uncertain intervals, with full power to indict and fine heavily any party keeping impure or inferior articles, would infallibly procure for the public a supply of genuine medicines. At present there is not one surgeon-apothecary in five hundred who tests by chemical analysis the purity of any article brought into his surgery.”

“ Very likely not. For my own part, if I could remember sufficient chemistry for the process, I would not dirty my fingers with it. But how could a country practitioner dispense with drugs, when there might not be a druggist’s shop within miles of his abode ?”

“Such a case *must* be an exception, and to prove the value of the rule, it is the only reasonable exception that can be urged against it ; the difficulty, however, would be easily met by allowing gentlemen practising in the country to dispense their own medicines, on producing proof that no druggist lived within a certain distance.” *

But it is useless to pursue this conversation further : the general practitioner will admit that his part in the dialogue is not overacted, and the general reader will recognise in the main features of the entire subject a faithful portraiture of those evils which he has long observed, if haply not long suffered under. It is no great pleasure, even to a doctor, to anatomize these most pernicious abuses, except with a practical view to their cure ; and if the public, in whom alone the remedial power is vested, mindful of the benefits it has received from the profession, will now reciprocate those benefits, and heal the diseases which disfigure and disable the medico-political body itself, the happiest results to society at large must ensue ; if the public will not enact the good Samaritan, the case is clearly hopeless, for no profession ever yet reformed its own abuses ; and although the

* However repugnant the politics of our Gallic neighbours may be to English tastes, there can be no doubt that in matters medical we might adopt many of their usages, with great advantage both to the profession and the public.

organic movement, as it is called, which at present agitates the medical community, cannot fail to accomplish much good in the internal economy of the profession, by placing doctor in a more righteous relation to doctor, yet that movement is and must be a corrupt, one-sided piece of policy, and medical organization will prove but a mere cry to disguise the ambition of factious cliques, if the public, *for whom alone medicine itself exists*, assert not its natural right to be the arbiter of this great question, and to make its just demands both heard and felt. Nor will this be at all difficult, for those demands are expressed in three simple and obvious propositions, viz. 1. The unconditional suppression of all quackery. 2. The abolition of dispensing and drug-selling, except by the regular druggist. 3. The appointment of medical men to all offices connected with the public health, and the exclusive administration by them of every branch of state medicine. The first of these would immediately arrest the sale of all quack nostrums, by which it is calculated 8000 lives per annum would be saved. It would also put a stop to the practice of druggists, by which 6000 more individuals would every year escape a premature grave ; and it would, lastly, bring to an end the impositions of those pretenders, who possessing no recognized diplomas to guarantee their competency to practise medicine, are necessarily doing

so at the expense of the public health ; this last effect would add 4000 more precious lives preserved from wanton destruction. The second—the compulsory abolition of all dispensing and medicine vending, except by the regular druggist, would have the effect of raising medical practice, as it is generally followed in this country, from a trade, to which the Apothecaries' Company has degraded it, to the rank of a noble profession, whence it has fallen through drug-selling. Next, it would prove a great act of public justice to the chemists and druggists, who are certainly a much injured and oppressed body of men. And lastly, it would obviate the fear of being over-physicked and overcharged, which at present deters so many persons of moderate means from applying to the general practitioner, until it is *too late*, and thus it would add at least 2000 more per annum to the number of the saved. The third proposition, although not connected with the estimates of mortality, and the means of remedying it hitherto adduced, is yet of equal if not greater importance ; for as the amount of mischief which has been and still is inflicted upon the inhabitants of these kingdoms, by the appointment of non-medical men to offices connected with the public health, has never yet been ascertained further than warrants a fair presumption that it is enormous, so the benefits resulting from the proposed change,

although indefinite, would yet be very great, and probably under ordinary circumstances, exceed both the others put together—that is, would result, in average healthy seasons, in the saving of more than 20,000 additional lives per annum, whilst in times when malignant epidemics were abroad among our population, the effects would be still more strikingly salutary.

These then are the points which should engage the instant and earnest attention of the public and the legislature. The various medical corporations have taken care of their respective interests in the bill which has been framed by their representatives, and is now ready to be presented to Parliament: let the country but invest this bill with the attributes of a great sanitary measure, and for true practical philanthropy, it will not be excelled by any act of Parliament of the age.

FINIS.

LONDON :

G. J. PALMER, PRINTER, SAVOY STREET, STRAND.





